

VZCZCXRO6284
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1288/01 1371341
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 171341Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3083
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001288

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2019
TAGS: [IZ](#) [KDEM](#) [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#)
SUBJECT: MINORITY QUOTAS IN UPCOMING IRAQI ELECTIONS

REF: A. A.) BAGHDAD 612
[1](#)B. B.) BAGHDAD 235
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Classified By: Acting Political Counselor John Fox for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Iraq's minority communities will have mandated representation in the Iraqi Kurdish Parliament following the KRG elections, currently scheduled for July 25. For the first time, Kurdish electoral law stipulates that Christians, Turkmen, and Armenians will receive 11 seats of the total 111 seats. Despite this success, Iraqi minorities Members of Parliament are pessimistic about the prospects for minority quotas in Iraq's upcoming national elections. They believe the Kurds, angered that the minority set-aside seat winners in the provincial elections joined the Arab political bloc on the Ninewah provincial council, will not support minority quotas at the national level despite the new set-asides in the Kurdish Parliament and their support for quotas in the January 2009 provincial elections. However, Iraqi political parties associated with the Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish blocs may add minorities to their lists in order to draw support from these communities, thereby guaranteeing minority representation even if there are no set-aside seats. End summary.

KRG Election Minority Quotas

[1](#)2. (U) On March 25, the Kurdish Regional Government enacted legislation to govern the next election for the Iraqi Kurdish Parliament (IKP), currently planned for July 25. Under this legislation, minority representation in the IKP will for the first time be codified by law. According to Article 36 of the implementing legislation, five seats will be allocated to Christians (Chaldean, Syrian, and Assyrian), five seats for Turkmen, and one seat for an Armenian. No allocation was made for the Yezidi community. In sum, ten percent of the KRG Parliamentary seats being contested in the election (11 out of 111) have been allocated to minorities. (Note: In the 2005 elections, the Kurdish Democratic Party ran as a group list called the "Kurdish Alliance." While not required to by law, the KDP divided up seats following the elections, and apportioned many to minorities, including four seats each to Christians and Turkmen, one to an Armenian, and three to Yezidis. End note.)

[1](#)3. (U) The codification of minority quotas in the KRG was the second time in the past year that political representation for minorities has been guaranteed by law. During the January 2009 provincial elections, six seats were set aside for minority candidates: three in Ninawah (one for Christians, one for Shabaks, and one for Yezidis), two in

Baghdad (one for Christians and one for Sabeen-Mandean), and one in Basra for Christians. Although this number was far lower than minority communities had wanted or expected, the inclusion of the six seats was a partial victory as the original implementing legislation for the provincial elections had guaranteed no seats for minorities.

What About the National Elections?

¶4. (C) Despite their success in the Kurdish region and in provincial elections, Baghdad-based minority politicians are pessimistic about securing minority quotas in the national elections expected to be held in January 2010. The 2005 parliamentary elections had no set-aside seats for minorities. Despite this, four minority candidates (two Christians, one Shabak and one Yezidi) were elected. Three of these -- Younadan Kanna (Assyrian), Hunein al-Qaddo (Shabak), and Yamin Farhan (Yezidi) -- in recent separate meetings told Poloff that, perhaps ironically, Kurdish politicians had told them that the Kurds would not support minority quotas in the national elections. The reason they were given for Kurdish opposition to minority quotas was the Kurds' displeasure following provincial elections in Ninawa Province that the minority candidates who won the province's three set-aside seats chose to join with the Arab political bloc over the Kurds on the provincial council. Dissenting from the opinion of the other minority politicians, Ablahad Sawa (Chaldean) told Poloff that he believed the Kurds would support minority quotas (Note: Sawa was elected in 2006 as a candidate with the Kurdish bloc. End note.).

¶5. (C) Kanna, Farhan, Qaddo and Sawa each indicated that,

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despite the challenges, they would push for quotas to be included in the legal framework for the national parliamentary elections in January 2010. Farhan told Poloff that the minority communities, negotiating strategy would be to ask for three seats each for the Christians, Yezidis and Shabaks, with the understanding that, at the end of the negotiations, each community would probably only receive one. Poloff also asked each MP about the possibility of minority candidates winning seats without the assistance of quotas by running independently or on the lists of other political parties. The four MPs were unanimous in the assessment that their communities were too small and too fractured politically to be able to win seats without the help of quotas. Hunein Qaddo was more blunt, saying that the other major political parties in Iraq (Dawa, ISCI, Sadrist, KDP, etc.) were recruiting supporters from within the minority communities, creating further divisions.

Are Quotas Necessary?

¶6. (C) Another prominent minority official, Alex Terchianian, an Armenian Christian who serves as a national security advisor to the Speaker of Parliament, told Poloff that he also believes Iraq's other major political parties are already seeking to add minority candidates to their own lists rather than support specific set-asides for minorities. Terchianian did not view this as a problem. Rather, he believed that this trend could help Iraq's minority communities as it would allow them to be allied with larger political blocs that could wield more power on their behalf in order to protect their constituents and garner votes in the future.

Comment

¶7. (C) Along with the January 2009 provincial elections, the codification of minority representation in the upcoming Kurdish Parliamentary elections is the second instance this

year in which political representation for Iraq's minority communities has been guaranteed by law. The political struggle over the implementing legislation for the next national Iraqi elections is only now just beginning. It remains to be seen whether the minority MPs have reason to be pessimistic about their chances for securing minority quotas but, if the past is any guide, Iraq's minority communities may come out better than they now predict. Terchanian's comments echo what we heard from several contacts after the provincial elections: that quotas actually may have reduced minority representation because they created a disincentive for the larger political parties to include minorities on their lists, as they had in the 2005 parliamentary elections.

End comment.

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